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Building by the Book

Renovation, addition provide new presence at Lakewood Public Library

By John Elliott | Photos by Robert Heine

As a public repository of knowledge, a library holds both the records of the past and the keys to the future. The city of Lakewood, one of Northeast Ohio's oldest and most progressive suburbs, has always taken great pride in its library. Maintaining this tradition has been a subject of great civic pride, as evidenced by the recent renovation and addition of the classic building on Detroit Avenue in the city's downtown.

With more than 11,000 visitors per week, the library is the community's cornerstone for lifelong learning and connection.

Visually speaking, it is impossible to distinguish the 53,000-square-foot renovation from the 46,000-square-foot addition; the building now spans an entire block along Detroit Avenue. The exterior design carries the "Carnegie-esque" architectural style that can be found in many early 20th Century library buildings. Inside, there is substantially more space for children's services, technology, audio-visual services, public seating and shelving capacity.

Needs drive expansion

In the 92 years since the original building was designed by the late Edward L. Tilton in 1916, the city's population has

nearly doubled and the library's collection has grown to 20 times the original volume. The community, ever proud of its library, wanted to make sure the institution maintained its tradition of excellence. The result is a state-of-the-art library that is a great public place, with rooms both grand and intimate, a destination that will attract Lakewood's vibrant community.

The design by New York City's Robert A.M. Stern Architects, LLP continues Lakewood's rich tradition of civic buildings in the classical architectural language. The addition is located to the east of the existing building; a monumental entry porch provides an expanded civic scale.

The \$17.8 million project was funded by a \$12.5 million bond issue passed in

2003, a building and technology fund and private gifts, notes Ken Warren, library director.

A citizens committee chaired by Lakewood attorney and city councilman Brian Powers identified the need for the addition and renovation in 2001.

The seamless integration of the old and new sections of the building attest to the unique ability of Robert A.M. Stern Architects, a firm that boasts a reputation for modern classical construction that has been pursued by cities such as Lakewood that want to preserve their sense of history along with meeting new and future needs. Other Stern projects include the Nashville, Tennessee Public Library; Bangor, Maine Public Library; Clearwater, Florida Public Library; Miami Beach, Florida Library; the Main

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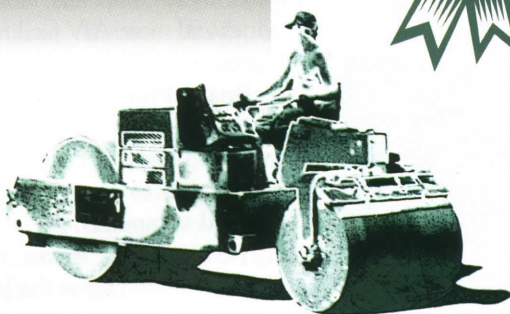
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STEPPING UP Presenting a challenge on the project was construction of a new staircase (top) where the existing building connects to the new addition (bottom).

Library in Jacksonville, Florida; and the Main Library in Columbus, Georgia.

Library updates over time

The Lakewood library has undergone numerous renovations and additions over the years.

The most recent addition was an audio-visual room on the first floor in 1981, which stretched the capabilities of children's activities, as well as a handicapped entrance ramp and elevator. The citizens committee recognized the need to create space for more computers, more children's activities and more A/V facilities.

"Space was on the top of the list," says Brian Powers, the councilman who chaired the citizen's committee. A modern library needs to house more materials due to the growth in CDs, DVDs and computers, he says. In addition, patrons now spend more time browsing and reading at the library.

Powers says libraries have always provided space for community meetings, but nowadays there are more diverse community needs to meet, such as seniors, book clubs and children's activities.

"You need to cater to the needs of all of those constituents," he says.

Powers notes that the committee decided to seek funds for a new facility and for operating money. In order to be as straightforward with the community as possible, they chose to place two separate issues on the ballot – one for each purpose – and both issues passed "by a landslide," according to Powers.

Once the voters gave their mandate, the library took measures to hear what type of changes the community wanted in a new design. Powers notes that the library staff and board of directors oversaw this process, which generated calls for more space for reading, materials and meeting.

Accessibility was a big theme that the staff and board heard. Patrons did not want to have to stand on ladders or kneel down to access materials.

"Part of the additional space was to make the materials accessible to everyone," Powers says.

In addition, the 1980s renovation gave the library a concrete overhang that some patrons did not care for.



"[The community] was not looking for something ultra modern," Warren says.

Adding the new space required the purchase of some adjacent buildings.

Selecting the right architect

The architect selection began in 2004. The committee was most interested in design excellence and reviewed proposals from 45 firms.

"We looked to all of the best architects that had done libraries all over the world," Warren says. "We believed Robert A.M. Stern was the most qualified to take the project."

The committee was particularly impressed by the work Stern did with a Bangor, Maine library.

"We liked the modern traditional approach that Robert A.M. Stern Architects presents," Warren says. "The library tradition is one of elevational enlightenment. You need a public institution that calls people to that potential. It's about raising the mind and developing brainpower in a city. You do it not only through programs, but through architecture... People in Lakewood value vintage architecture.

People were looking for something sensitive to this neighborhood context. The library has always had connection to the historical sensitivity."

Julie Nymann, project manager for Robert A.M. Stern Architects, says the library needed an update.

"It was time that the physical facility got up to date with the service that was in place," she says. "The design had sort of lost its way [having been covered with various additions over the years]. Lakewood saw us as architects that really respect the cities the libraries are in."

Cleveland-based CBLH Design coordinated the design work for the New York firm.

"Our firm took the design documents and put their information into construction documents so they could be bid to the trades," says Marc Bittinger, a principal at CBLH.

Bittinger says Stern brought a vision of permanency in addition to functionality. He notes that Stern's design criteria are very specific.

"They're very descriptive about what they want from the design," Bittinger

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says. "They were involved all the way through the process."

Design captures original grandeur

The interior design captures the classical grandeur of the original building with many large spaces that offer strong visual statements using detailed oak paneled furnishings, traditional artwork and bright wall colors. Rooms are announced by shiny metal-lettered signs mounted on the walls. Bookshelves are made of distinctive oak frames.

Bittinger says Stern took some of the colors from the Thorwaldsen Museum in Denmark, where the climate is very similar to Northeast Ohio. The bright colors enliven people in a cold, grey climate.

"It's something for people to enjoy," Bittinger says.

With Bittinger's assistance, Stern oversaw the design specifications that were contracted out to local trades.

"It's a process where the architectural firm is refining [its] understanding of the functional requirements," Warren says.

KEY COLORS The bright color choices were influenced by the Thorwaldsen Museum in Denmark, according to CBLH Principal Marc Bittinger.

Many of Stern's concepts worked their way into the renovation as well as the addition, such as the skylights in the main reading room and the lobby.

The floors in the main corridor and stairways are terrazzo while those in the children's, computer and reception areas are cork.

A majestic entrance

The main entrance on Detroit Avenue has a civic-scaled entry porch supported by four columns. Twin light sconces flank the front door, giving a welcoming invitation to enter the building. A large entrance foyer extends the full height of the two-story building. Glass curtainwall covers much of the front, creating a connection between the inside and the outside.

The first main area on the entry level features the new children's library, with custom furniture and environments for exploration, along with expanded collections. The setting is perfect for crafts, story telling and family activities.



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TEAM EFFORT (From left) Behind the project were Marc Bittenger, of CBLH Design Inc.; Ken Warren, of Lakewood Public Library; and Mark Panzica and Joe Sprinzl, of Panzica Construction.

An adjacent room provides for children's programs. The north side contains a kitchen pantry and other children's rooms with colorful walls and carpets and linoleum floors.

The first floor also features an auditorium with a 1,800-square-foot stage and a carpeted floor, acoustic walls and oak wainscoting. The stage has built-in spotlights.

Another meeting room hosts book sales, which are held four times a year.

Convenient to the entry and main desk is a large room holding popular materials — current periodicals and new books.

The rear section on the south end houses a loading dock, mail sorting area, lockers for the 90-person staff, and a drop-off/pickup window.

Upper floor: more treasures

The upper floor can be accessed by a stairwell or one of three elevators. This floor houses the audiovisual room that overlooks the front foyer, from which one can easily view Detroit Avenue and the beautiful Christian Science church building across the street.

The expanded audiovisual department accommodates the library's fast-growing collection of videos, CDs and DVDs. Most of the library's collections are spread between the new and existing buildings.

The technology center has new equipment and ergonomic furniture. The center offers 80 Internet-connected computer stations, doubling the previous capacity, and an electronic learning lab for teaching computer skills. Windows offer natural light and views of the neighboring residential area.

A business and administrative area has slightly more subdued yellow walls.

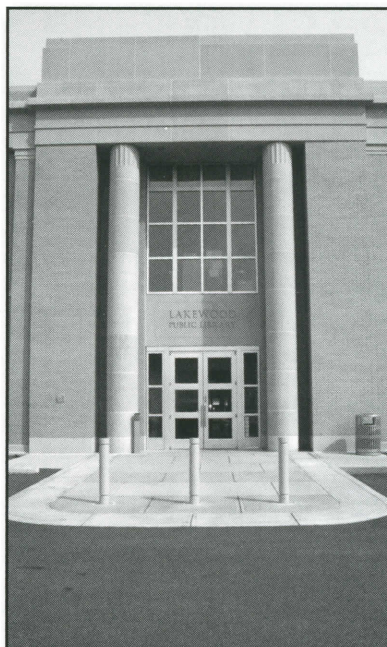
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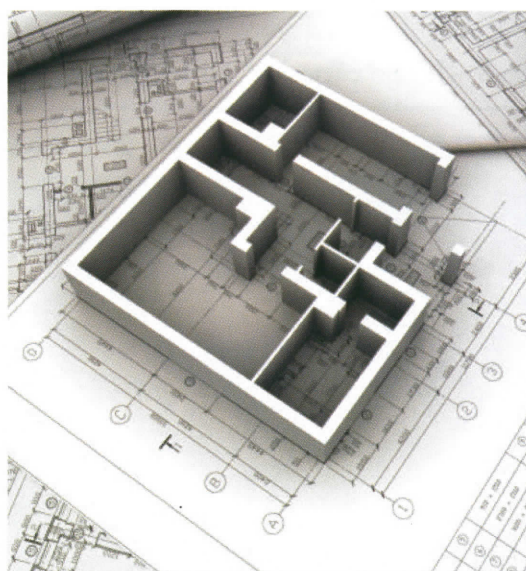
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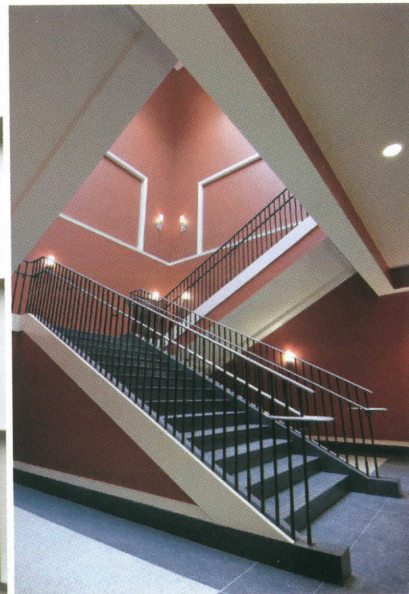


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LOOKING UP A large entrance foyer extends the full height of the two-story building. Glass curtainwall covers much of the front, creating a connection between the inside and the outside. Upper floors can be accessed by a stairwell (right) or one of three elevators.

Several second floor balconies with metal rails overlook the intersection on the first floor where the main book collection, circulation and the north and south galleries all come together.

The most memorable room of all is the Grand Reading Room, a place for quiet reading and traditional study that inspires intellectual purpose and respect for public library decorum. The oak-paneled room, 50 feet long by 30 feet wide, and 30 feet high, serves as a living room for the entire community with soaring ceilings, filtered natural light and views overlooking Detroit Avenue.

Located just above the main entrance, the Grand Reading Room is

furnished with wood tables and carrels. Alcoves north and south offer lounge chairs for casual reading. Hidden skylights filter natural light throughout the room. Translucent panels soften some of the light.

“Over time, the Grand Reading Room will be recognized as one of the great grand reading rooms in the nation.”

Ken Warren
Lakewood Public Library

Large canvas murals by Wisconsin artist Richard Haas on both the east and west sides of the Grand Reading Room cover the full length of the

rooms over the entryways and captivate the imagination. Haas can be viewed in action on the popular website YouTube (www.youtube.com), along with the construction of the scaffolds that he used to paint the murals. Abundant

natural light, compelling art, dignified oak furnishings, distinctive book collections and vivid colors all complement Haas' visionary murals.

Adding even more drama to the Grand Reading Room are three cylindrical light fixtures that resemble wheels with spoke-like wires suspended from the high ceiling by silver colored chains. The walls are yellow with white trim, and the carpeting is regal red.

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"Over time, the Grand Reading Room will be recognized as one of the great grand reading rooms in the nation," Warren says.

A more intimate quiet reading room is located to the south, away from the bustle of Detroit Avenue.

A second new entry on the building's south side opens directly to an expanded parking lot. Much like the kitchen door of many Midwestern houses, it provides a convenient, less formal way into the building.

The project consisted of two phases, the renovation and the addition. The renovation was completed in June of 2007 while the addition becomes compete this month.

New building uses precast concrete

The new building took the grey color of the older steel-frame building by using precast concrete panels, notes Mark Panzica, project manager of Mayfield Village-based Panzica Construction, the construction manager.

Panzica oversaw the entire process of the library addition and renovation from pre-construction services to weekly meetings and coordination with the trades, the design team and the client.

"We took a team oriented approach," Warren says.

The original building's mechanical and electrical systems were completely replaced with modern energy-efficient systems. Panzica notes that electrical, mechanical and plumbing systems all had to be replaced from the basement to the roof.

"We were able to adapt the mechanical system to fit within the existing space while maintaining the integrity of the architectural design, which was not an easy task," he says.

The heating and ventilation was completely replaced by seven rooftop heating units on a slope-tapered roof during the addition and renovation phase. An insulation and rubber membrane system replaced the existing roof.

While the library did not pursue official Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification in the renovation and addition, the design still adheres to principles and methodologies that constitute the backbone of the LEED system. Most rooms have both automated and individual temperature controls to save energy.

Changes of time captured on A/V

The construction and renovation challenge inspired a four-part audiovisual presentation, titled "In the Guts of the Library," hosted by Panzica and viewable at www.youtube.com. The presentation, narrated by Joe Sprinzl, Panzica's project superintendent, covers differences in floor and roof construction from 1916, 1923, 1954, 1981 and the present.

"We try to create educational value from every opportunity possible," Warren says.

Getting material to the site, which covers an entire block on Detroit Avenue, was also challenging, notes Jim Fantozi, vice president of operations for Warrensville Heights-based Infinity Construction, which served as prime contractor for general trades. He said they reused a fair amount of material from the old building, including steel, concrete stone and brick. It was necessary to work closely with the city to keep traffic away from the work area.

"The city of Lakewood was very good to work with," he says.

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Most of the materials were delivered from the rear of the building, where a single-family home was demolished to make way for the expanded parking area. The parking lot doubled to 62 spaces and the landscaping around the new building blends with the existing garden.

Fantozzi says that the grand staircase in the older building was extended to the new one. The construction team extended the existing staircase to the new building using precast stone panels. Temporary walls were installed around the staircase while it was completed.

"You can't tell where the new one starts and the old one was," Bittinger says.

A skylight over the grand staircase brings natural light down to the lower level.

A similar type of stairway can be seen in old photographs of the original library that had been removed in one of the many previous renovations. The new stairway reconnects with the past while providing a great place to meet, and in the future, perhaps a place for art.

Art galleries greet visitors

Visual statements are dominant in every public area, including both the front and back entrances.

With the help of the Lakewood Public Library Foundation, the library raised almost \$500,000 for art. The front and back entrances are both graced with

gallery-like hallways that lead to an expanded check-in desk. The galleries exhibit photographs of Lakewood, past and present.

The Lakewood Public Library Foundation sponsored a successful photography contest that generated 34 photographs from 23 Lakewood artists. Artists received a \$200 award for each winning photograph. These photographs, which feature inspiring views of Lakewood's architecture, community and natural beauty, are now framed and hung in the galleries.

The public library is increasingly viewed not only as an educational and social center, but also as an economic engine that can drive urban redevelopment. Modern, high quality library

facilities bring people downtown who might not otherwise come. This in turn can help other businesses.

Libraries can also be drawing cards to businesses thinking of moving into a community. High quality library systems speak of a commitment to education and its result: a high quality work force.

Most importantly, libraries bring life to their community, and can point the way to an integrated neighborhood, with housing, stores and workplaces all within walking distance of the library.

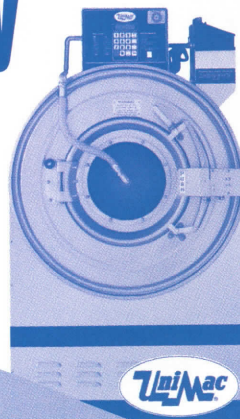
"The new facility is gorgeous," says Brian Powers, the councilman who chaired the citizens committee. "[The library staff] did a great job of communicating the needs of the community." **P**



MAKING SPACE As part of the project, the library's parking lot has been doubled to 62 spaces to accommodate additional patrons.

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